

Working Paper No. 68

HIGHER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA : SOME ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

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HIGHER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA:
SOME ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

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Education has always been accorded an honoured place in Indian society. The great leaders of the Indian freedom movement realised the fundamental role of education and stressed its unique significance for national development. Gandhiji formulated the scheme of Basic Education seeking to harmonise intellectual and manual work. This was a great step forward in making education directly relevant to the life of the people.

After attaining independence a major concern of the Government of India and of the States has been to give increasing attention to education. For the attainment of this goal the need was felt to bring about certain changes in the system of education. Thus several Committees and Commissions set up by the government from time to time came up with suggestions to tackle the problems of educational reconstruction. The need to link education with national development was emphasised and for this the educational system needs to be properly organised both qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Thus, a system of University education which produces

a high proportion of competent professional manpower can be of great help in increasing productivity and for promoting economic growth. The present system of university education produces graduates and post-graduates each year in large numbers. However, they are not adequately trained from the point of view of skill formation. As a result the problem of unemployment continues unabated and retards economic growth. These are primarily the types of problems with which our planners are faced today and so there is an urgent need to re-organise the educational system.

The Five Year Plans have been laying greater emphasis on the improvement of facilities for technical and professional education as well as research, since education can contribute directly to economic development by increasing the availability and quality of occupational skills. For this there is a need to bring about improvements in the quality and standards of higher education and research and to expand educational facilities so as to meet the manpower requirement at the national level.

The present paper is an attempt to review the progress of Higher Education in India under various plans, identify the causes of its expansion, and study how higher education can be integrated with economic needs.

Challenges for Higher Education

At present we find widespread discontent about the system of higher education in our country. It is criticised mainly for its lack of relevance and adequacy to meet the needs of the people living in a modern society. Many attempts have been made during the past two decades to revise the system of higher education, to overcome these defects and bridge the gap between life, education and economic needs. However, the situation is far from satisfactory.

Before we think of a strategy for developing a life-centred curriculum for higher education it is better to examine the problems of higher education. The goals of higher education in the past were discovery and dissemination of knowledge i.e research and teaching, and sole emphasis was laid on knowledge and its accumulation irrespective of its utility to the people at large. This feature has changed now as the policy of democratisation has made higher education accessible to all people eligible to pursue it. The Indian Education Commission appointed in 1964 also felt the necessity of producing useful educated citizens and suggested radical changes in the education system. It emphasised the need for expansion of higher education to meet the manpower needs of the society and to contribute to national development.

These broad national goals need to be translated into local needs and conditions, which means there is a need for careful planning of curriculum for higher education. This is more so with regard to professional and vocational education where people are being trained for higher skills and higher levels of learning ignoring their relevance to the existing conditions. This naturally results in problems like brain-drain and educated unemployment. If it is not possible to develop a skill that is not saleable, then it is only wasting the resources of the nation.

The purpose of education is manifold. Among its objectives are, to prepare the people for economic development and overcoming technical, cultural and social backwardness. Some of the important problems of national development are self-sufficiency in food, economic growth, full employment, social and national integration etc. Higher education in India has, therefore, to serve these definite objectives.

In the light of the above objectives of higher education the problems of economic productivity, employment, social and economic inequalities are some of our most important problems and it is the responsibility of the system of higher education to meet these problems. This in turn, it is possible only if the right type of opportunities are made available to one and all, subject to certain unavoidable constraints. Thus, we are faced with the duty of providing equal opportunities

for all sections of people. The higher education system has to face this problem squarely and change its structure and modus operandi to provide facilities to the deprived group in the shortest possible time.

The attainment of freedom not only gave India a new status but also gave rise to new aims, new hopes and greater aspirations. For the achievement of these various objectives one felt that education could play a crucial role. The whole situation was aptly summarised by the University Education Commission (1949) in its statement:

"We are today faced with great problems, national and social, the acquisition of economic independence, the increase of general prosperity, the attainment of an effective democracy over-riding the distinctions of caste and creed, rich and poor, and a rise in the level of culture. For the quick and effective realisation of these aims education is a powerful weapon, if it is organised efficiently and in the public interest. As we claim to be civilised people, we must regard the higher education of the rising generation as one of our chief concerns"¹

While framing national economic policies and plans the importance of higher education has not been ignored but the main problem has been one of limited financial resources. The University Education Commission had suggested that considering the paucity of resources, expansion of higher education should be restricted and efforts should be made to make use of students for the benefit of society. The Commission had strongly

¹ University Education Commission, 1949.

recommended placing of education under the concurrent control of the States and the Centre and setting up a University Grants Commission. It had also expressed itself in favour of establishment of Rural Universities. Besides the problem of over crowding in Universities it had also given some thought to the question of medium of instruction.²

1. Higher Education Under the Plans

The First Plan had limited objectives regarding higher education. These were : (i) reorganisation of University education; (ii) efforts to provide text-books and other literature in the shortest time; (iii) restrictions on the rush in Universities; (iv) establishment of Rural Universities.

The reorganisation of University education involved three inter-related ideas : (i) reform of the existing educational system to enable it to yield the best results it is capable of yielding; (ii) the building up of a new system more suited to national needs; and (iii) defining the relationship among various systems of education existing side by side. Another immediate task in connection with University education was the need to plan the transition in respect of medium of instruction carefully so that necessary text-books and other literature could be managed. It was also understood that many of the students receiving higher education were not able to derive much benefit. Therefore, to reduce the pressure of numbers in Universities, vocational education at lower

2 Ibid.

levels was given importance. The plan accepted the recommendation of the University Education Commission to establish Rural Universities. During this plan University Grants Commission was also established to look into the problems of higher education and to give suggestions.³

The Second Plan was concerned with the problems of : (i) improvement of quality of higher education, and (ii) rush for higher education. For improving the quality of higher education a number of measures were suggested by the University Grants Commission. Important amongst them were diversification of courses at the secondary level to discourage the rush at higher levels of education and changes in recruitment methods to public sector jobs. The latter, it was felt, would provide a greater purpose and direction to University education and would be helpful in enhancing the contribution of higher education to economic development.⁴

During the Third Five Year Plan importance of education to economic development was realised with a greater sense of urgency. One of the major aims of this plan was to expand and intensify the educational efforts and to bring every home within its fold so that in future education could become the focal point of planned economic development in all fields of national life. The Plan mentions:

3 First Five Year Plan, Government of India, pp. 223-24.

4 Second Five Year Plan, Government of India, pp. 76-78.

"Education is the most important single factor in achieving rapid economic development and technological progress and in creating a social opportunity. Programmes of education lie at the base of the energies of the people and to develop the national and human resources of every part of the country".

Till the Third Five Year Plan U.G.C. had initiated a series of measures to improve the quality of University education. Important among these were : (i) introduction of a three-year degree course; (ii) improvement of libraries and laboratories; (iii) development of post-graduate studies and research; (iv) provision of hostel facilities; (v) institution of merit and research scholarship; (vi) improvement of pay scales of teachers; (vii) organisation of tutorials and seminars and greater attention to the welfare of students; (viii) introduction of correspondence courses on a large scale, and (ix) opening of evening classes. To implement such a multi-objective scheme of education, a sum of Rs.589 crores was spent during the Third Plan. Out of that Rs.212 crores was spent on higher education. In comparison Rs.153 crores and Rs.273 crores were spent on education in the first and second Plans respectively, of which Rs.34 crores and Rs.97 crores were spent on higher education in the respective Plans.⁵ The three annual plans spent Rs.321.50 crores on education of which Rs.157.7 crores was spent on higher education. Details of Plan-wise expenditure can be seen in table-1.

5 Third Five Year Plan, a draft outline, Government of India, pp. 103-4.

The Fourth Plan attempted to face three major tasks in the field of education : (i) to remove deficiencies in the existing educational system and link it more effectively with the increasing demands of social and economic development; (ii) to remove internal stresses and strains in the educational system which developed as a consequence of rapid expansion during the first three plans; and (iii) to extend the system in response to social urges and economic needs. Investment in education was designed to obtain better returns by avoiding waste and improving quality. High priority was given to the training of technical personnel. At the post-matric and University stages, the emphasis was on diverting students to vocational, technical and professional channels and on extending facilities for science and post-graduate teaching and research work. The quality of teaching was sought to be improved with greater insistence on the training of teachers and by linking increases in the salaries to improvement in qualifications. Research on curriculum and methods of teaching were to be intensified. Particular emphasis was laid on extending adult education and functional literacy as an instrument of economic development. It was intended that every student of merit should be able to study upto the highest level and poverty should not stand in his way. The technology of education was to be improved to secure better results at less cost by insisting on large sized institutions, utilization of buildings, libraries and laboratories for longer hours, part time and correspondence courses etc.⁶

⁶ Fourth Five Year Plan, Government of India, pp. 316-18.

The Fifth Plan had two-main objectives for higher education : (i) Consolidation and improvement of education; (ii) Creation of additional educational facilities for weaker sections of society especially in the backward areas. It proposed expansion of higher education through evening colleges, correspondence courses and provision of private study. Post-graduate education and research was to be strengthened through the development of centres for advanced study, science service centres, common computer facilities and regional institutes, seminars and orientation courses etc. Efforts were also made to improve the general conditions and quality improvement of Faculties, revision of pay scales and raising the minimum qualifications for appointments. This Plan had also introduced Faculty Improvement Programme (FIP) for University and College teachers and Quality Improvement Programme (QIP) for teachers of Technical Institutions so that the old staff with lower qualifications or poor academic record could get a change to improve their qualifications by going in for advanced studies.

The Sixth Plan has laid emphasis on : (i) Coordination and maximum utilisation of the existing system of higher education; (ii) improvement of quality of higher education; (iii) special consideration to the problems of Third Generation Learners; (iv) Linkage between education, employment and economic development.⁷

7 Sixth Five Year Plan, Government of India, p-357.

By the time the Sixth Plan was launched enough had already been done in providing educational facilities. The need, therefore, was not so much for the extension of these facilities as it was for their better and more efficient utilisation. The Sixth Plan felt that the existing imbalances in the level of development of Universities among themselves as well as in relation to colleges would have to be examined for suitable remedial programmes and selective support in keeping with their requirements, potential and scope. Growth of non-viable institutions needed to be checked to avoid increasing unemployment among graduates and to make better use of available economic resources for educational development.

For improving the quality of higher education emphasis was placed by the Sixth Plan on redesigning of under-graduate courses and their restructuring to improve employment orientation. In the area of post-graduate education and research, emphasis was to be placed on promoting the research and development capability of the University system and on inter-disciplinary studies, particularly in new emerging areas of knowledge relevant to national development objectives. Universities would not only extend frontiers of knowledge but also supply such knowledge to solve problems of the community on which they depend.

The Sixth Plan has given special consideration to the problems of first generation learners, particularly the socially disadvantaged sections for whom higher education provides

a transition. The socio-economic aspirations of the community would need to be harmonized with the academic pattern.

The Sixth Plan realises the importance of education for development and envisages concerted efforts to forge beneficial links among education, employment and economic development. A Committee of Experts has already been set up by the Planning Commission to examine the various aspects of the issues involved in detail. According to them, it is necessary that educational programmes are related to manpower profiles (existing and needed) in the development and occupational areas/sectors and provide for adequate levels and scope of pre-employment knowledge and skill, as also for continuing education for those who are already employed. The entire educational system must, in fact, respond to this important aspect of human resource development as one of the major purposes of education is to equip the students for a gainful working life with a capability of learning to match new job requirements. There are, no doubt, deeper reasons for unemployment among the educated but, to some extent, the mismatch between education and employment is due to the kind of education and training which students get i.e. traditional courses.⁸ Higher education has a major responsibility in this regard. Establishment of a proper match between education and development would require :

8 Sixth Five Year Plan, Government of India, pp.358.

- a) restructuring of under-graduate courses to make them purposeful and also terminal for those who wish to seek employment,
- b) provision of vocational courses leading to employment and structured for certificate or diploma, rather than an academic degree, and
- c) emphasis at the post-graduate level on research, on practical problems of local and regional relevance as well as on fundamental research.

The minimum objective of such a programme would be to make the first degree courses more relevant and responsive to the development needs of the community and link education with work/field/practical experience and productivity by introducing students to relevant applied areas of the subjects of their study. These will have the advantage of achieving a greater sensitisation of the academic community to the problems of poverty, illiteracy and environmental degradation.

2. Technical Education

Expansion of Technical Education has also taken place in India. In the Plans, the attention of the government was drawn to the need for encouragement of scientific and technical education and for stimulating research in the country. A number of national laboratories were also set up for various specific purposes, the first of these being the National Physical Laboratory at New Delhi and the National Chemical Laboratory at Poona. In 1960 there were as many as 20 such institutions spread through the length and breadth of the country which offered facilities for the highest levels of

research. This number had gone upto ^{47 by 1977-80.} Till the end of the Third Plan, facilities existed in technical institutions for an annual admission of 24,700 students to degree and 49,900 students to diploma courses. In addition, 4000 seats for degree courses and 3,400 for diploma courses had been approved. The annual out turn from these facilities was expected to meet the likely demand for engineering graduates and diploma holders in the Fourth Plan. At the degree level, it was estimated that the demand for the Fifth Plan would also be largely met and no large scale expansion was considered necessary during the Fourth Plan. Fifth Plan lays emphasis on the development of part-time and correspondence courses to provide opportunities for study to those who have had to leave full time educational institutions to enter employment. In organizing these courses, it would be ensured that standards are maintained at the same level as in full time education. It also proposed to offer short-term and correspondence courses in modern techniques and methods of management for the benefit of the large number of small entrepreneurs. It was necessary to take an integrated view of the facilities being provided in the country as a whole from all those institutions, and link them more functionally with the requirements.

Generally, the emphasis in the Sixth Plan was on consolidation and quality improvement in terms of faculty development, replacement of obsolete equipment and diversification of courses. The Sixth Plan takes into account the extensive infrastructure

facilities that have been created for technical education at diploma, degree and post-graduate levels as well as for supporting services like teacher education and curriculum development. The emphasis during the plan is on:

- a) consolidation and optimum utilization of these facilities,
- b) identification of critical areas and creation of necessary facilities for education in emerging technologies in the light of proper assessment of future technological manpower requirements,
- c) improvements in quality of technical education at all levels and,
- d) furtherance of national efforts to develop and apply science and technology as an instrument of the country's socio-economic progress.

The planners feel that efforts towards consolidation would ensure that the development schemes initiated in the earlier plans would be completed in all their aspects and the facilities would be modernised. This would help to increase the efficiency of the system, reduce wastage and raise the present courses above the critical level of technical education facilities. These requirements would be assessed for the next ten years, separately for States and types of specialisation, so that taking into account the lead-time involved, educational efforts required to be initiated immediately could be specified and taken up. Suitable mechanism for this purpose would need to be established for the collection, storage, up-dating and processing of manpower and related data to assist technical education planning.

Facilities would be developed for manpower training in areas like computer science, product development, maintenance engineering, instrumentation and bio-science. Centres for advanced studies and research would also be set up in selected institutions in emerging technologies.

Budgetary Provision for Higher Education

The expenditure on education in general and on higher education in particular has been rapidly increasing in each successive Plan* (see table 1). In the First Plan total expenditure on education was only Rs.153 crores while the total outlay allocated for education is Rs.2,523.74 crores in the Sixth Plan which shows an annual growth of 44.27%. Expenditure on higher education has gone up to Rs.763.36 crores in the Sixth Plan from Rs.34 crores in the First Plan. The annual growth of expenditure on higher education comes to 61.30% which is much higher than the growth of general education for the same period.

The percentage share of higher education in the total plan allocation for education as a whole increased from the First Plan upto the end of the annual plans. However, subsequently the share went down in terms of percentage although there was a substantial increase in the absolute figures allocated to higher education. Thus, while in the Annual Plans Rs.77 crores had been allocated to University education the corresponding figure for the Sixth Plan was Rs.485.75 crores,

* The term Higher Education includes University and Technical Education.

which is more than a six fold increase. Similar increases can be seen in the other categories of higher education. Therefore, the expenditure on education on the whole has gone up considerably and over the years there has been a greater thrust on spreading literacy and to universalising elementary education under the Minimum Needs Programme and the revised 20-Point Programme. Consequently allocation for higher education has shown a proportionate decline since the end of the Annual Plans. However, expenditure on education as a percentage to total plan expenditure has a declining trend after the Third Plan period.

Table-1

(Rs. in Crores)

Plan period	Expenditure on all types of education	Expenditure on University education	Expenditure on Technical education	Total expenditure on higher edu. (3 + 4)	Expenditure on edu. as % of total Plan exp.	Expenditure on higher edu. (University/Tech.) as % of total exp. on edu.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
First Plan	153	14	20	34	7.80	22.22
Second Plan	273	48	49	97	5.84	35.53
Third Plan	589	87	125	212	6.87	35.99
Annual Plan	322	77	81	158	4.85	49.05
Fourth Plan	786	195	106	301	4.98	38.30
Fifth Plan	911	204	109	313	3.17	34.36
Sixth Plan	2523	486	278	763	3.47	30.25

Computed from : 1. A hand book of Education and allied Statistics, Ministry of Education and Culture, Government of India, New Delhi, 1980, Tables 10.1, 10.3
 2. Sixth Five Year Plan, 1980-85, Government of India, Planning Commission, Table 21.2

Reasons for Expansion of Higher Education

The expansion of Universities and the increase in the number of persons enrolled in colleges and other institutions of higher education is a striking feature since independence.

Table 2 gives a picture of expansion of higher education. In 1950-51 there were only 27 Universities and 542 colleges and research institutions with 3.6 lakh students. The teacher student ratio was 1:19.3. After five years five additional Universities and 230 colleges and research institutions were established while enrolment increased by 2.7 lakhs. The teacher-student ratio also went up by 17 per cent even though 9,235 new teachers were appointed. By the year 1960-61 total number of Universities was 45 and colleges 1122 with 8.9 lakhs students enrolled and teacher-student ratio became 1:21.3. By 1970-71 we had 86 Universities, 2792 colleges and 22.1 lakh students. In 1980-81 the number of Universities rose to 116 (inclusive of deemed Universities) colleges to 4719 and enrolment to 27.43 lakhs. There has been a substantial expansion in enrolment at all levels of education in India (see table 2). In the past three decades (1951-1981) the number of Universities, colleges and enrolment has gone up by 430%, 870% and 762% respectively.

The expansion of numbers has, however, been accompanied by a certain measure of deterioration in quality. The Indian educational system has not been sufficiently geared to economic development, especially at the primary and secondary levels, mainly because insufficient attention has been paid to vocational and agricultural education. For accelerating economic development and for improving the quality of the society which we are trying to create, it is essential that planning should establish a firm and purposive link between education and development.

Table 2

Year	No. of Universities	No. of colleges and research institutions	No. of pupils in Arts, Science and Commerce at Univ. stage (lakhs)	No. of Teachers in Arts Science Commerce College	Teacher/Student Ratio
1	2	3	4	5	6
1950-51	27	542	3.60	18648	19.3
1955-56	32	772	6.30	27883	22.6
1960-61	45	1122	8.90	41759	21.3
1965-66	64	1788	14.90	66882	22.3
1970-71	86	2792	22.10	-	-
1975-76	100	4272	24.30	151804	16.0
1980-81	116	4719	27.43	-	-

Source : Computed from:

India 1973,

India 1982, Government of India

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, pp.48,

Table 5.1.

Inspite of such a great expansion of higher education, there is still a wide gap between demand and supply of institutions of higher education. Interestingly, while the number of educated unemployed has been increasing, this has had no effect on the demand for higher education. The following could be some of the possible reasons for this somewhat paradoxical situation : (i) increasing population : During the last three decades population has gone up rapidly which has led to an increase in demand for higher education, (ii) awakening among the rural areas : Progress of urban areas has had a demonstration effect in the rural areas. Since the progress of urban areas has been related to higher education, therefore, demand for it has also gone up in rural areas, (iii) cheap higher education : Leaving professional education aside, higher education in general is available in India at a very low price. Indian college students today do not come only from moderate social and economic background but also from the poorer sections of society,⁹ (iv) Social status : the traditional notion of education as a status symbol has received a strong impetus from the demand for equality by the socially backward sections of society. Irrespective of its utility, people prefer to acquire at least a graduate degree, (v) changing job values : the decreasing social value of manual jobs has also increased the demand for higher education, (vi) unsuccessful middle education : our educational system at the middle level has failed to provide effective and attractive terminal,

9 In 1961, Kerala University had about 60% students from families whose income was less than Rs.200/-p.m. and majority of them got white collar jobs with moderate salary after acquiring a graduate degree. Govt. of India, Min. of Education, Survey of Living Conditions of University Students 1961, Delhi.

vocational and technical education¹⁰, therefore, people are keen to acquire a degree which has become a passport to employment both in government and private sectors, (vii) Political influence in the post-independence era, with the democratic forces on the ascendent, there has been an increasing demand for more universities and centres of higher learning. The attention of the Government was forcibly drawn to the need for more universities and colleges in the constituencies of Members of Parliament. Besides, territorial, caste and religious communities want colleges (and found them) and regions within States want universities (and get them).¹¹

Thus we find that a number of factors are responsible for the expansion of higher education. Of these the tremendous growth in the means of communications and mass media and increased social intercourse are some important ones. The expansion of higher education could have been much greater had more institutions been provided in the countryside and secondly had the economic conditions of the people been better.

There is also an urgent need to evolve a system of manpower planning whereby the specific requirements of the various sectors regarding type and number of trained personnel required are catered to either on an annual basis or over a period of time rather than the present system of education which turns

10 Education Commission, 1964-66, 'One of the Major Reforms we envisage'.

11 Education and Politics in India, Rudolph and Rudolph edited, 'Public Interest and Politicization under Popular Higher Education', pp.34.

out graduates and post-graduates indiscriminately who are fit only for white-collar jobs. Therefore, university education should certainly be intimately linked to development programmes so that a sizeable expenditure on higher education is profitably utilized for training young men and women for specific assignments under the national plans. It is only through coordination between the universities and development projects that we can succeed in resolving the existing paradox of a large number of educated unemployed on the one hand and many development schemes remaining unimplemented for want of properly trained personal, on the other. A poor country like India cannot afford to spend large sums of money on higher education either for catering to the needs of other countries through a process of 'brain-drain' or for keeping them unemployed and frustrated throughout life.

To conclude it may, therefore, be said that there is an urgent need to bring about some radical changes in the educational system. There is an immediate need to restructure the under-graduate courses. The present system of a generalised education is leading to an overflow of educated people who are not really trained for any specific job. The result is that while fresh graduates keep adding to the already existing backlog of unemployment there are various categories of jobs that are not filled simply because there is a scarcity of skilled personnel. It is, therefore, necessary that after the high

school or intermediate levels avenues of vocational training should be readily available according to the aptitude of the candidates. This will also ensure the regular supply of skilled manpower. Moreover, some structural change in courses are also required. The graduates from different disciplines find themselves ignorant about 'working' when they join a job. Therefore, it is suggested to re-structure the courses in such a manner that while attaining certain education a candidate should be imparted with practical knowledge of the jobs. For example those seeking law degree should also devote some time in courts for practical knowledge of their subject, students of commerce should be given practical banking and accounting knowledge etc.

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